



Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCA) and the Batak Cultural Minorities of Northern Palawan, Philippines

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Abstract

This nascent study examines the current state of the Batak indigenous people in So. Tinitian, Brgy. Tagnipa, Roxas, Palawan as they engage with external institutions in the process of ICCA declaration of their ancestral domain in the midst that legal land and resources rights recognition had been elusive in the past; it should be clearly noted that Batak has not been able to access Certificate of Ancestral Domain Titles that grants land rights under the provisions of R.A.

8371 or the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA Law of 1997). The Batak indigenous people are termed as 'vanishing tribes', and central to this study is to understand the dynamics of ICCA in the socio-economic and cultural context of the dwindling indigenous population situated within a biodiversity hotspot as with the remaining 17 households of Bataks dwelling within Mt. Cleopatra's needle. Specifically the study discusses the current socio-economic conditions and changing cultural perspectives vis-a-vis their use and access of natural resources within their ancestral domain. Focus group discussions (FGD), key informant interviews (KII), literature reviews and community immersion were conducted for data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

The results of the study reveal that the Batak household as a marginal group is facing multi-faceted challenges that influence the state of their economic and cultural lives. Cultural assimilation is visible in the fading use of the Batak dialect among majority of the youth, shifts from traditional to modern medical and healing practices and loss of oral history and indigenous knowledge systems and practices related to forest and agricultural livelihood. Meaningful participation of the Batak in local conservation is also interrelated to the current lack of awareness and access to information and policies, lack of participation and representation in local governance, restricted access and non-recognition to indigenous resources rights and culture along with persisting problems of upland rural poverty. It is deemed that the rationale of ICCA as a policy tool of conservation anchored in the recognition of cultural rights might provide the framework of much needed social protection of the Batak Indigenous community if such challenges are tackled and addressed in the process.

Keywords: Indigenous People; Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas; Cultural sustainability.

1. Introduction

The apprehension about the preservation and maintenance of traditional knowledge is not only motivated to conserve biodiversity but to live on Indigenous People's (IP) ancestral lands, to safeguard local food security and to its extent exercise their local economic, cultural and political autonomy [5]. A number of global organizations have been notable in linking global sustainability to a greater awareness of indigenous knowledge, rights, and interest of IP's over the resources they manage [6].

In the Philippines, IP as basic sector are considered as the stewards of the natural resources in their ancestral lands as reflected in their intimate cultural relations with the environment. According to author [14], there are approximately 370 million IP occupying 20% of the earth's territory. These territories are rich in natural resources which are continuously threatened by extractive industries and other large scale economic industries.

In turn, IP and their communities which host remaining fragile ecosystems with rich biological diversity are continuously at risk. On this note, constitutional and legislative protection of the existence and rights of indigenous peoples and local communities is critical to capacitate nations to address these issues [6]. The acknowledgement of ICCAs has been a recent global phenomenon compelled by local communities, NGOs and some government institutions [2] that resulted to the creation of both opportunities and challenges for conservation practice. The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 in the country clearly stipulated that the Indigenous community shall have the right to manage their ancestral domains through Traditional Resource Management Practices. Similarly, ICCAs is being defined as:

Natural and/or modified ecosystems containing significant biodiversity values, ecological services and cultural values, voluntarily conserved by IP's and local communities, both sedentary and mobile through customary laws or other effective means (IUCN/CEESP, 2008) Author in [10] has identified three imperative features of ICCA namely: a) it involves a community closely connected to the ecosystem culturally or because of livelihood needs; b) management decisions of the community effectively lead to conservation although this may not be the principal objective; and c) the community is the major decision maker and community institutions have the capability to enforce regulations.

Likewise, there are identified motivations for modern ICCAs such as access to livelihood resources, security of land and resource tenure, security from outside threats, financial benefits from ecosystem functions, rehabilitation of degraded resources and participation to promote cultural identity and cohesiveness [2].

Given this context, there are countries which still suffer from different abuses and conflict of interests between the IP and private corporation in terms of the extraction of natural resources. This reality results to persisting violation of IP rights that also affected their culture because: 1) their lands have cultural significance as these embodies spiritual values for them and are considered sacred; and 2) domination and discrimination have contributed to their culture to be viewed as something irrelevant, inferior, primitive and something to be eradicated or transformed [14].

In the country, there are approximately 14 to 17 million indigenous peoples belonging to 110 ethno-linguistic groups. They are mainly concentrated in Northern Luzon (Cordillera Administrative Region) and Mindanao. Some groups are in the Visayan region [13].

Like the other indigenous groups in the rest of the world, IP in the Philippines face different problems that threaten their cultural identities and ancestral domains. These in turn lead to development aggression. In order to strengthen their stand against development aggression, IP movements lobbied for legal and policy recognition of their rights to land, resources and self-determination. Among these is the RA 8371, also known as Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA), which provides mechanisms of land rights thru the acquisition of Certificates of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT). However since 1998, there have been many failures in its implementation. The process was hindered by different policy issues. In fact in 2012, only two CADTs were approved by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). According to them, there is still a need for better titling procedures before they approve more documents.

Literature reveals that the documentation on ICCAs is limited, though now promptly increasing due to international attention given to them [11,1,7] .While documentation is limited there is even less consultations on the side of policy implications.

One of the indigenous groups who applied for the CADT in 2010 was the Batak tribe in Sitio Tagnipa, Roxas, Palawan. However, until now, their requests have not been processed. They still face the threats of land seizure and unauthorized resource extraction.

As a response to the bureaucratic process failures of CADT as a legal recognition to their ancestral domain, this study was conducted to serve as a supporting document for the community to be declared as Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCA). This document is anchored in the two defining characteristic of ICCA which have been observed in the community: 1) the community has a close relationship with their environment; and 2) harnessing local knowledge and sustainable indigenous knowledge contributes to future endeavors.

In line with this, research inquiry aims to understand the dynamics of ICCA as a conservation policy tool in the socio-economic and cultural context of the dwindling indigenous population situated within a biodiversity hotspot as with the remaining 17 households of Bataks dwelling within Mt. Cleopatra's Needle. Specifically the study discuss the current socio-economic conditions and changing cultural perspectives vis-a-vis their use and access of natural resources within their ancestral domain. It is deemed that posing this research query will provide useful insights in the dynamics of ICCA in the context of the community ground dynamics and contribute to its policy rationale to safeguard ecological conservation and IP communities' welfare.

2. Materials and Methods

This qualitative research study was a collaborative undertaking between the Department of Social Development Studies, College of Human Ecology and Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD). As per ethical and policy requirement, a Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) process was conducted from the leaders and members of the Batak tribe. In collaboration with PCSD, the FPIC was submitted to and approved by the NCIP. In documenting the ICCA of the Batak tribe in Roxas, Palawan, participatory research methodologies were employed namely: community immersion, key informant interview, focus group discussion, and participatory community based mapping. This was to ensure that all of the aspects about the social, political, economic, ecological and cultural characteristics or situations of the tribe were captured and verified. Community immersion was critical in establishing and building rapport with the tribe. By living with the community, the researchers were able to participate on their daily activities. First-hand experiences of the situation of the Batak lead to a deeper understanding of the tribe's identity, problems, and aspirations.

The social, political, economic, environmental, and cultural characteristics and situations of the community were tackled through a focus group discussion. These include social and political systems, beliefs and norms, religion, social services, traditional medical practices, relationship with the local government, economic activities, and views on natural resources among others.

Key informant interviews were needed to determine certain traditional rituals, practices, myths, songs, dances,

and key historical events that only the elders of the tribe have knowledge of. The key informants were the tribe's elders, chieftain and remaining members who are pure Batak.

A survey interview was also conducted in order to identify the socio-demographic profile and economic practices of the tribe. Respondents of the survey include a complete enumeration of all of the 17 households of the Batak tribe. Secondary data were gathered through the review of different literatures. PCSD documents about the policies affecting the Batak tribe, and a map of the tribe's proposed ancestral domain claim were also utilized.

The availability of the key informants and the limited literature specifically on the Batak tribe were identified as some of the limitation of the study.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Fading History and Changing Identity

Among all members of the Batak tribe, only one elder is knowledgeable of the Batak's origins and history. Lucadia Lavega also known as "Nanay Kadia", 60 years old, they do not have any myths or historical origin of their Tribe's name, hence, the name of the Batak Tribe does not have a clear origin. However according to literature, the word "Batak" is an old Cuyunen term which means "mountain people" [8] because they are usually living in the mountains.

It is believed that the first communities of the Batak tribe settled on the coastal areas of Barangay Babuyan, Tinitian and Malacampo [8] but later on moved to Sitio Tagnipa to avoid contact from other tribes. They were afraid that the people may harm them. This clearly reflects that the Batak tribe is generally non-confrontational and peace loving. Retreating to the mountains is a response by the tribe to outsiders which reflects that the tribe lives in alienation and fear.

This characteristic results to land seizure of their ancestral domain. The reduced land territory delimited their access and control over natural resources. This situation pushed them to settle farther into the mountains where forest products are abundant. However, because of their distance from urban areas, social services are less accessible to the Batak tribe.

In 1972, an unknown epidemic disease with the same symptoms as diarrhea, brought about by the contaminated water source had caused multiple deaths among the Batak tribe.

The tribe's council of elders during that time thought the disease is communicable. As a result, the Batak left their settlements, scattered, and divided into small groups. The division of their communities weakened their cultural practice, sense of security, and assertion of rights as a tribe.

Nowadays, the Batak tribes can be found in the different areas of Palawan such as Babuyan, Maoyon, Tanabag, Tarabanan, Tagnipa, Caramay, Tagnaya at Langogan [8]. However, only three communities are predominantly

of Batak namely: Tanabag, Caramay and Langogan. Others like Tagnaya and Tagnipa have been absorbed into Tagbanua settlements [9].

At present, there are only few families in Sitio Tagnipa which can be called as a pure blood Batak. In fact, there are only three (3) pure blooded Batak left in the tribe and they are also the eldest among members namely – Nanay Kadia, Nanay Dionisia and Nanay Marita.

Because of the abundance of farming lands in Batak territory, other tribes like the Tagbanua, Cuyunen and Cagayanen migrate to the Batak community which leads to intermarriage and later on, the decrease of pure-blooded Batak tribe members

In addition, the tribe has a custom in which the male should transfer to the place where his wife came from. These intermarriages contributed to the absorption of the Batak male members on other tribes. Currently, almost all the Batak children carry only one-fourth of the Batak's blood.

Given that the remaining three pure blooded Batak are late adults and the present generation only carries one-fourth of Batak's blood, this study has affirmed that the Batak tribe in Sitio Tagnipa is now vanishing in terms of population. Aside from this problem, the Batak also have problems in upholding their cultural development brought about by the assimilation and intergenerational gaps among the tribe members.

3.2. Socio-Demographic Profile of the Batak Tribe

The Batak tribe in Sitio Tagnipa, Barangay Tinitian, Roxas ,Palawan is composed of 17 households. They have a total population of 70 people. The sex ratio of the tribe is also balanced with 36 males and 34 females.

3.2.1. Age

Some (35%) of the Batak population are children ranging from 0-10 years old. There are also members (18%) with ages between 11-20 years old. Hence, the age structure of the tribe can be described as relatively young population. This implies that there is a high dependency ratio in the tribe because most of the members are not in the labor force.

3.2.2. Educational Status

Majority (21) of the adults in the tribe are elementary undergraduate. Almost all of them only finished up to Grade 2 or Grade 3 level. This shows that the literacy rate of the Batak tribe is relatively low. Factors affecting the literacy rate would include the proximity to school, financial problem and the discrimination experienced by the indigenous people.

The establishment of their own IP school named Balay yat Pag-adalan kat mga Katutubo provided the younger generations an opportunity to have a better access to education. Currently, the school accommodates 47 students wherein 33 of them are members of the tribe while the other 14 are from the outside of their community. More

than half (63%) of the students are in elementary level, 18% of them are in the primary level and 12% are in the high school level. In addition, six students from the tribe had passed the exam to become 7th grade and four of them are now entering high school. It was found out also that there are two college students in the community. The school has employed two curriculums namely Alternative Learning System (ALS) and Advanced Christian Education (ACE) with only five teachers in the school.

Several organizations and private individuals provide financial and non-financial assistance. One of which is the NCIP, that extended assistance for the school's feeding program for the students.

Another institution that helped in the development of the school was the Lyceum University of the Philippines (LPU) through their extension program. With their assistance, the tribe was able to develop their own mother-tongue curriculum in order to revive the Batak culture and their own dialect called *Binatak*. They use visual aids translated in *Binatak* and they showcase the different tools which are culturally used by the Batak because most of the students are not familiar with it anymore.

As part of their ACE, Christianity and values are inculcated to the students through Batak stories which convey moral lessons. Nonetheless, the Christianity has contributed to the vanishing culture values of the Batak tribe since they inculcated "Christian norms" in accordance with the teachings of the Bible.

However, even with the free and accessible education in the community, financial constraints remain as the primary reason why some of the students did not finish studying because they need to work for their family.

3.2.3. Health Aspect

The Batak tribe has traditional healers called babaylan. They cure sickness by performing a dance ritual called kendar and through the use of different herbal medicines. They also believed to have the ability to track lost tribe members. Becoming a babaylan requires years of training. Unfortunately there are no babaylan left in the tribe nowadays.

One of the reasons for the loss of the babaylan and their rituals was the exposure of the Batak community to contemporary medical services and practices. Now, they opt to seek medical attention from the nearest health center which is located at the center of the barangay whenever they are sick. In addition, there are many organizations which give them health assistance. Dr. Villanueva from the Philippine General Hospital (PGH) conducts medical mission every year. In addition, the members of the Batak tribe are beneficiaries of World Help where they can get financial assistance for their hospital bills.

For maternal health, free pre-natal check-ups are available in the health center of Barangay Tinitian. If they want to deliver their babies in the health center, they need to pay as much as Php 2,000 for the medicines and other needed medical services. Hence, they still prefer the traditional child birth practice facilitated by their family members. Immediate family serves as their support system in maternal care. Some traditional beliefs are observed regarding the protection of the newborn child. They use bamboo stems to repel what they believed as aswang (mythical creatures).

The common diseases in the community include communicable diseases such as colds and coughs. On the other hand, the incidence of malaria in the community is relatively low. This is because of the early detection of malaria victims through blood smearing activities done with the help of the Barangay Health Worker (BHW) and other organizations like the Shell Foundation of the Philippines.

In terms of their sanitation, all of the houses have their own bathroom. There are two communal bathrooms in the community. Moreover, Logos Hope, a non-government organization donated a dam which serves as a new source of clean drinking water.

3.2.4. Environmental Situation

With the help of Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD), the Batak tribe was able to delineate their ancestral land claim which has a total area of 1,169 ha. This ancestral domain is a mountainous region with cliffs, caves and rivers. It is also rich with natural resources coming from its forest ecosystem. These resources remain intact except from the small-scale economic activities of the tribe and nearby communities.

One of the most valuable natural resource found in the ancestral domain of the tribe is the almaciga resin or locally known as bagtik. Regulation of the extraction of the said resource was done through PCSD Resolution No. 04-233. According to the resolution, only the indigenous people are allowed to tap bagtik because it is located in their tribal zones.

Another policy that affects the utilization of resources within the ancestral land of the Batak tribe is the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) regulation that only allows the practice of kaingin in secondary-growth forests. Unlike the PCSD resolution, this policy has a negative effect to the tribe's economic and cultural practice. Traditionally, the tribe practices a long-follow in the kaingin of their forest land. However, due to this regulation, the areas where that they can kaingin were delimited. As a result, they were forced to plant on certain areas more frequently. These lands were not given enough time to regenerate its lost nutrients without the traditional long-follow practice of the tribe. In addition, the yield of upland rice planted on these areas is lower. The tribe needs to burn a larger area in order to cope with this decreased yield.

A close relationship between the environment and the tribe's culture was also observed. This can be reflected to the myths and stories being passed to the generations of the tribe. One example with would be the story of one Batak who was not able to grow rice properly because he failed to show gratitude to the spirit of rice that gave him food. This story shows that the Batak tribe sees the environment as a provider and not just a resource to be exploited.

Finally, the Batak tribe believes that everyone has the right to access natural resources as long as they work hard in gathering and harvesting the products. All the forest products which grow and can be found in the area are considered to be created by nature and the Supreme Being, therefore no one owns them. They are all expected to be stewards of nature, in the form of taking care of the place and the living flora and fauna in the forest. This sense of ownership is contrary to the popular notion of owning private properties.

3.2.5. Economic Practices

Most (8) of the households of the Batak tribe only earns Php 2,000 a month. This indicates that more than half of them (56%) of them are living below the poverty line. This is based on the poverty threshold according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) in 2013 which is Php 8,022 for a family of five.

Most of the income of the members of the Batak tribe comes from selling non-timber forest products (NTFP) such as bagtik, honey and rattan. All of these can be found in the tribe's ancestral land.

Collecting bagtik, is a difficult and dangerous work. Almaciga trees (*Agathis philippinensis*) can only be found at an altitude of 200 to 2,000 meters above sea level. In order to reach this, the Batak will walk uphill for six hours. Some of the paths are beside cliffs and are slippery during rainy days. They will stay in the mountains for three days to collect bagtik. Afterwards, they will carry 40 to 80 kg of bagtik downhill to the local buyer or middleman. The middleman will then buy the bagtik for P13-25 per kg depending on its quality.

Another source of income of the Batak tribe is harvesting honey. Unlike the collection of bagtik which they do year-round, the tribe only collects honey during summer. They sell a gallon of honey for P350-400.

The tribe also sells rattan on an order basis. A piece of rattan is sold at Php 7.00, while the processed rattan is sold at Php 60.00 for 100 pieces. This can be used for making ceilings and roofs.

On the other hand, the tribe still practice their traditional agricultural practice called kaingin. They clear a certain area of the mountain by burning the plants and trees. The burned plants will serve as fertilizer for the soil. After clearing the land, they will plant rice and cultivate it until it is ready for harvest. They leave the land after harvest for it to regenerate its lost minerals and nutrients and find another place to plant again.

Lastly, from subsistence farming practice, the Batak tribe has explored other ways for them to earn money like working as laborers in farms owned by well-off individuals. The wage ranges from Php 120-200 per day, which is also not enough to feed a family of five for a day.

3.2.6. Changing Indigenous Political System

The tribe is headed by the Chieftain or a Pagbelgèn (pag-bel-nguhn) in Binatak. The chieftain functions as the facilitator of meetings, decision-maker, conflict manager and external relation system manager. In early times, the chieftain is the only leader of the tribe. He or she is very powerful in making decisions and his or her decision is final and must be followed by the whole tribe. Today, the chieftain together with his or her Kagawad (4) and Tanod (2) lead the tribe. The kagawad's responsibilities are to support the chieftain and to act as the messenger while the tanod's responsibilities are to protect and defend the tribe's welfare.

In the past, the eldest among the tribe is considered as the tribal leader because he or she is perceived as the most capable and knowledgeable individual in the tribe. Furthermore, they do not have other constituents like the kagawad and tanod. Today, they elect the tribal chieftain as well as the tanod and kagawad. The

qualifications for being a chieftain includes a mature age, was born in the sitio, has the capability to hold the position, is respected by all the members of the tribe, and is willing to accept the responsibilities wholeheartedly. In the Batak tribe, both men and women can be chieftain. On the other hand, qualifications of the kagawad and tanod include earning the respect of the whole community and the willingness to act on the given responsibilities.

A meeting is called for an election to happen where all the elders and those perceived to be in the right age can cast their vote by raising their hands. Anyone qualified can nominate and be nominated but the nominees are often endorsed by the elders and the former chieftain. In the past, it can be observed that the passing of responsibilities of being a chieftain is among father and sons or among siblings. However, it can be observed that chieftains nowadays are not directly from the bloodline of the former chieftain but still they are close relatives.

One factor which affected the delineation of the bloodline of the chieftains is their migration pattern in terms of marriage. When a man from a bloodline of chieftain marries a woman from another tribe, he will settle in his wife's place and become part of the tribe itself. In return, if there is no one among the remaining family members who wants to take place as the new chieftain, they will select from their other relatives.

The duration of the service rendered by the chieftain is based on the chieftain's will. If he or she felt that he or she cannot fulfil the chieftain's role anymore, then, the community will now elect a new one. From the election process and other community welfare, it is illustrated that the political structure of the Batak is basically consensus building.

3.2.7. Tribe's External Relations

The external relation of the tribe among the Local Government Unit (LGU), Barangay Development Council (BDC), Non-government organizations (NGOs), Church and other tourists have paved way to different developmental interventions which affected the community of the Batak both positive and negative.

Local Government Unit

The Local Government Unit does not have a close relationship with the Batak tribe primarily because the town proper of Roxas is far away from their Sitio. Nevertheless, some of the tribe members are beneficiaries of government programs such as the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) or the Conditional Cash Transfer program which gives financial assistance to pregnant women and families having a child with ages from 0-18 years old. The financial aid is usually spent by the Batak for food, health care and education. Moreover, the municipality of Roxas constructed a basketball court for recreation. Every Sunday, members of the Batak play with other people coming from the outside of their community. This infrastructure motivates other people to go into the Batak community.

Barangay Development Council

During meetings in the barangay, the leaders and some members of the Batak tribe are invited to attend. However, they cannot comprehend the issue being discussed in the meeting. They regard themselves just as audience. This has something to do with the study of author no [12]. When he emphasized that political marginalization still persist. This was due to little or no experience in administrative matters and IPs has difficulties to effectively manage and to fully utilize their allocated political functions.

In 2010, the Tagnipa Batak submitted their application for Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) in order to protect their ancestral land against other people outside their community. There are no developments in their application process at the barangay level until now. Thus, their land rights are still under the threats of outsiders.

Church

Pastor Ricardo Dela Cruz is a Christian missionary which settled down in the Batak community in the year 2000. He serves as the spiritual leader and converted the members of the Batak tribe into Born Again Christian. They built their own church where they worship every Sunday. They also have prayer meetings every Wednesday night. Every last week of the month, they celebrate Family Day in the Tinitian river. Their spiritual leader has provided an avenue for other organizations to reach the community of Batak. One concrete example of this is the collaboration of the church with a Korean organization to gain funds for their IP school.

Other Organizations

Through the years, different organizations have entered the community of the Batak tribe in Sitio Tagnipa. One of which is the HARIBON-Palawan which helped them build a dam in 1993 to serve as a source of safe water for the whole community.

3.3. Challenges Faced by the Community

3.3.1. Erosion of Indigenous Knowledge, Practices and Values

The vanishing culture of the Batak tribe can be attributed to intergenerational gaps and cultural assimilation. First, the intergenerational gaps among the adults of Batak and the children nowadays are manifested in the preferences of the young people to learn the Batak cultural practices. Most of them think that their cultural practices are no longer relevant in the modern times. Furthermore, the fact that they are not pure Batak contributed to the option of having other culture to practice.

Upholding cultural development is not only threatened by preference but also by the lack of initiative of the elders to pass their indigenous beliefs and knowledge. They only teach the younger generation their cultural practices if they expressed their willingness to learn.

On the other hand, the influx of migrants and intermarriages contributed immensely to the declining population of the tribe. This led to community assimilation and the result was for the cultural identities of the children to be divided.

Furthermore, the main dialect of the tribe called Binatak is no longer used. Hence, it is under the serious threat of being forgotten. As the Batak started to communicate with other people, they have learned other dialects like Cuyunen and Tagalog and used them more often.

3.3.2. Poverty as a Multifaceted Issue

Despite that they live in a place with bountiful natural resources, the Batak tribe do not earn enough to sustain their needs. One of the factors which contribute to this issue is the very costly permits and certificates which need to be secured in order to legally transport and sell the forest products. As a result, the Batak were forced to sell the NTFP to a middleman and concessioners at a very low price where their profit is not enough to provide the needs of their family. Furthermore, the tribe can be easily deceived by the middleman in terms of classifying the quality of bagtik because they lack the knowledge on the proper grading of it.

Another market issue being faced by the Batak is credit dependence on the buyer. Before they go up into the mountains to gather the products, they borrow cash or food products that they will need during their stay in the mountains as well as the food which they will leave for their family. At times, the products collected are not enough to pay back the credit from the buyer resulting to a never ending debt.

Effect of poverty is not only felt on the delivery of the basic needs of the Batak tribe. Coping with poverty compelled them to modify their traditional livelihood practices. These modifications could have repercussions to their environment. One concrete example would be in their practice of Almaciga tapping. They tend to tap the almaciga trees more frequently because of the low cost of the resin. Over tapping could lead to the death of the almaciga trees.

The modifications in their livelihood practices also contribute to the vanishing of the tribe's indigenous ecological knowledge and practices. Alternative livelihood like working as laborers in farms results to less interaction with the forest. The children of the Batak are no longer exposed to the indigenous ways of economic activities and the traditions are not passed on through actual practice. Not all of the indigenous knowledge and practices can be taught by word of mouth but by hands-on experience. Originally, the economic practices of the Batak tribe are not only about earning but also about culture, life skills and communication with the environment.

3.3.3. Non-Recognition of Rights to Resource and Culture

Without the CADT, the Batak tribe cannot fully assert their rights to their natural resources. Hence, tribe's ancestral lands are still under a serious threat of land grabbing and competition against outsiders over natural resources. Some activities of the outsiders inside their ancestral lands include *kaingin*, almaciga tapping and gold panning. The tribe cannot monitor and prohibit the unsustainable activities of the outsiders without the

legal support of CADT.

Recognition of their right and capacity to manage the natural resources in their ancestral land is a critical factor for the success of ICCA. This was also observed in the community conserved areas studied by author [5]. They argued that guaranteed land right and respect to their customary decision-making processes are essential for IP to conserve and develop their indigenous knowledge and practices in accordance to their own management style and economic needs. The complexities of the new instruments toward forest management and ancestral domain claims have force that IPs who are dependent on forestlands when it comes to their livelihood to engage in legally sophisticated interaction with the government agencies [4].

3.3.4. Lack of Information, Education and Meaningful Participation in Policy Formulation and Development Intervention

Projects and programs implemented by institutions and organizations outside of the Batak tribe like the LGU and Church may have a positive objective for the community in improving their educational, health, economic and cultural situations. However, the lack of information and education, both on the side of proponents and stakeholders, may have negative implications like the alteration of the tribe's values and traditions.

Legal recognition of IP's rights and resources is important but not enough. Multiple legislations have been enacted in the Philippines with the purpose of conserving natural resources while recognizing IP rights. Without informed decision making from the IP however, these legislations will only constrain their livelihood practices [12].

Policies and development interventions should be consultative in order for them to have real impact and reduced negative effects. This would also give a sense of ownership to the tribe and make them feel empowered because they have the chance to decide on their own. Policies and development interventions should also be tailored to fit the specific and special needs of the Batak tribe as an indigenous community. Efficient information dissemination among the IP should also be practiced to avoid lack of awareness among these interventions.

Finally, the tribe members only act as spectators in the barangay meetings despite their willingness to attend. Having minimal or no experience in administrative matters, IP have difficulties in exercising their political functions [12]. They have minimal participation and decision-making power in terms of governance at the barangay level. This practically shows the existence of political marginalization. Proper representation of the Batak tribe in the Barangay Development Council is needed in order to assist them in implementing policies and programs that are sensitive to the needs and culture of the tribe. It was highlighted also by author [12] that decentralization failed to facilitate local decision making, that instead of improving local resource management, it brought up complexities as clearly shown in the case of Batak.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The results of the study reveal that the Batak household as a minority is facing multi-faceted challenges that influence the state of their economic and cultural lives. Cultural assimilation is visible in the fading use of the

Batak dialect among majority of the youth, shifts from traditional to modern medical and healing practices and loss of oral history and indigenous knowledge systems and practices related to forest and agricultural livelihood.

Meaningful participation of the Batak in local conservation is also interrelated to the current lack of awareness and access to information and policies, lack of participation and representation in local governance, restricted access and non-recognition to indigenous resources rights and culture along with persisting problems of upland poverty.

There is need to integrated historical perspectives and structural lenses to understand the complex context of the Batak as a ‘vanishing’ tribe. Recognition of resources rights and their central role in conservation program entails institutions to understand the influencing factors that led changes and trajectories of the Batak socio-economic and cultural lives. These also include the need to devise mechanisms to enhance their representation in local governance as a cultural minority and address socio-economic marginalization as primary natural resources users once ICCA is put into place.

It is deemed that the rationale of ICCA as a policy tool of conservation anchored in the recognition of cultural rights might provide the framework of much needed social protection of the Batak. Moreover, it can help secure their territorial base, reaffirm cultural identities and guarantee some degree of autonomy over resource management [5] of other indigenous communities if such challenges are tackled and addressed in the process.

In line with these, the following recommendations are being proposed.

4.1. Participatory Development of Policies and Programs

Policies and programs to be developed should be consultative and not imposed by the outsiders. In this way, the concerns of both parties must be taken into consideration in making programs and projects. Though it may seem tedious to meet half way, it will be more effective because the standards and procedures are set by the community and legislators. Communities and its people should not be seen only as passive recipient of interventions because they themselves know very well what they really need. Development is a two way process where the community participation and institutional collaboration work in a dynamic process. This has clearly reiterated by author no. [3] when they cited that it is crucial that measures towards recognition are sensitive to the local situation for often top-down forms of recognition and monetary support can end up undermining local initiatives.

4.2. Declaration of the Area as a Tribal Ancestral Zone (TAZ)

There are other ways to uphold indigenous community’s rights over their land, life and resources. ICCA is seen as one of the potential policy instrument to support the rights to the natural resources of the tribe in lieu that CADT processing has many bureaucratic failures. The process of recognizing their areas as an ICCA will strengthen their defense against threats of powerful corporations with interests to operate extractive economic activities which may eventually exploit the resources as well the people. Cultural development and conservation will only advance when the community is empowered and rights are respected. A good start in showing respect

is by giving what they deserve because they have their own ways in protecting and cultivating their lands. Indigenous knowledge plays a very important role in conserving the environment because this has been tested through time.

4.3. Holistic Community Development Approaches

Policies do not exist in a vacuum. The socio-economic, political and cultural situation interact with policies that may either reinforce or restrict its effectiveness. These factors should also be taken into consideration before creating policies to ensure that it will really help the target sectors. Strategies may include IEC materials, capacity building and alternative market.

4.4. Institutional Support

Presence of institutional support to advance equitable benefit sharing mechanisms will ensure the economic and social welfare of almaciga tappers. When there is a concrete support for almaciga tappers and they earn more from tapping, they will be more motivated to participate in the conservation of their forest area. Lastly, it is crucial for the government and civil society to recognize ICCAs and offer them support.

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